DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 346 602 EA 024 049

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TITLE Roots, Trees, and the Forest: An Effective Schools Development Sequence.
PUB DATE Apr 92
NOTE 32p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 20-24, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Educational Environment; *Educational Improvement; *Effective Schools Research; Elementary Secondary Education; *Institutional Characteristics; Outcomes of Education; *Program Development; Program Effectiveness; *School Effectiveness

ABSTRACT

Findings from a study that examined the implementation of an effective schools development process are presented in this study. The study was designed to track both implementation process objectives drawn from seven correlates of instructionally effective schools and student outcomes from 1988-90 in a small-city school district in a rural state. The case study involved interviews conducted in the first year with 205 teachers and 13 administrators (a 95 percent sample) and in the final year with 5 teachers and 7 principals, document analysis of student and school administrative process records, and assessment of pupil and school performance in relation to the seven effective schools characteristics in 1988. A follow-up study included a pre-post analysis of student performance and interviews with 45 teachers. Outcomes included improved pupil performance and attendance. With regard to equity, virtually no gains were made for low income children in schools with a high percentage of low income populations. Stakeholders' views of change focused on school climate, leadership, school mission, and home/school relationship. A conclusion is that linking school improvement strategies within schools builds synergy; overemphasizing one strategy diffuses energy and commitment. (19 references; 10 figures, 4 tables) (LMI)

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ROOTS, TREES, AND THE FOREST:

AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS DEVELOPMENT SEQUENCE

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A paper presented at the 1992 AERA Annual Meeting
San Francisco, California
23 April, 1992

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of an Effective Schools development process (Holcomb, E. and McCue, L., 1991), which spanned the years 1988 through 1990 in a small city school district located in a rural state. Specifically, the study was designed to track both implementation process objectives drawn from seven correlates of instructionally effective schools (Gauthier, 1982; Shoemaker, 1982) and student outcomes over the three year period. The primary question for the study was, to what extent has each school within the district made progress towards stated goals of higher performance for all students (quality); and, in particular, to what extent has each school make progress towards reducing the disparity in performance between low income and other children (equity)? A secondary question was, what was the role of the district administration during this process? Finally, the tertiary question was, how did stakeholders in the process view the connection between the seven correlates of effective schools and the outcomes stated for students?

Among the perspectives taken by the study, the content basis for implementation was effective schools research (Edmonds, 1979; Shoemaker, 1982; Purkey and Smith, 1983; and Rowan, Bossert & Dyer,1983). Briefly, this perspective asserts that there are certain characteristics of instructionally effective schools which are correlated with high pupil performance and the equality of educational outcomes.

A second perspective was the process of change and implementation of the correlates as described by Holcomb, et.al. (1991), Mackenzie (1983), and Brookover, et.al. (1982). This perspective asserts that through an interactive process of school improvement which is driven by the data on agreed upon outcomes (Schlechty, 1991) and which elicits the participation in decision making of stakeholders in the process (Lezotte, 1990a; Fullan, 1990), schools within districts can make changes in policy and practice which will be correlated with changes in student outcomes.

Bases for Implementing Effective Schools Research

The content basis for implementing a process whereby schools that were less effective might become more effective has been grounded in largely correlational research of the late 1970's and 1980's done by such researchers as Edmonds (1978), Brookover and Lezotte (1979) Gauthier (1982,1985) Weiss (1984), Bamburg and Andrews (1987), Kijai (1988) and Brousseau (1989). Content basis here is defined as the organizational and behavioral characteristics of schools which when measured by either direct observation or reliable instrumentation are correlated with a specific definition of school success (Levine and Lezotte, 1990).

Characteristics or Correlates of Effective Schools.

Throughout the late 1970's and the 1980's there was considerable agreement upon five major characteristics of effective schools (Levine and Lezotte, 1990).

These included: 1) a safe and orderly school climate, 2) high expectations for student success, 3) strong administrative leadership, 4) the frequent monitoring of student progress and, 5) an emphasis on student acquisition of basic skills from a clearly defined instructional program (Edmonds, 1978). Additional characteristics identified by Gauthier (1982, 1985); Shoemaker (1982) and Villanova (1984) which included 6) time to learn and 7) positive home-school relations were studied by Weiss (1984) and included in several case studies (Taylor, 1990).

As Levine and Lezotte (1990) have indicated, there is not total agreement that the correlates cited above are the only important characteristics of effective schools (Cf. Stedman, 1987). In addition, the correlates seem to be themselves correlated and this fact has complicated research to identify a model of school effectiveness which might be considered potentially causal (Frederick and Clauset, 1985).

Identifying Effective Schools.

Having acknowledged the limitations present in the identification of the characteristics of effective schools however, the five to seven characteristics of schools have appeared to be related to higher levels of quality (as measured by gains on standard measures of performance) and equity (as measured by the disaggregation of achievement measures by SES and race/ethnicity as well as gender. (Levine and Lezotte, 1990) As these authors point out, varying definitions of criteria for effectiveness have themselves been the subject of much debate and have produced conflicting conclusions.

Some researchers have observed that some schools found to be effective under the definitions implied above in one subject or at one grade level do not necessarily remain within the definition when other subjects or grade levels are studied (Rowan, Bossert, and Dyer, 1983).

Levine and Lezotte (1990) in their review of the literature on the identification of effective schools through specific criteria concluded that further research would be best served by a broad approach which: 1) include but not be limited to the measurement of mechanical skills, 2) emphasize performance in the upper grades, 3) control for errors of measurement, 4) utilize both normed and criterion measures of achievement, 5) use a method for validating the classification of students' poverty status, 6) disaggregate achievement by SES; and 7) disaggregate achievement data by gender.

Processes for Creating Effective Schools.

Given an acceptance of the general characteristics and criteria for an effective school outlined above, the typical model for creating an effective school in the 1980's was that identified by Stringfield and Teddlie (1987). The model (as reported in Levine and Lezotte, 1990) began with 1) strengthening leadership (including the formation of building level teams), 2) identifying a vision, 3) conducting an audit of certain characteristics of an effective school (safety, climate, basics, methods of instruction and curriculum, enrichment and community involvement), 4) increasing staff development, 5) increasing teacher evaluation, 6) increasing homework and 7) increasing special program coordination with the regular program.

Despite the fact that the seven steps identified by Stringfield and Teddlie (1987) related well to the characteristics of the model of effective schools identified by correlational research, many researchers noted that school development rarely followed the step by step sequence of a rational model (Louis and Miles, 1990; Meyer, 1988; Clark, Lotto and Astuto, 1984). As more and more school development projects were studied with qualitative methods (Louis and Miles, 1990) the nuances of school change processes which related to organizational culture (Carlson, 1987; Deal, 1985; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Deal and Peterson, 1989) became the basis for a differentiated picture of how some effective schools might be created. As case studies of school development multiplied, the patterns of growth seemed to become more complex (Firestone and Wilson, 1989; Vaill, 1989). The increasing complexity leads to some uncertainty about the utility of rational models in creating effective schools (Vaill, 1989).

Nevertheless, rational models of school change persist in the effective schools implementation literature (New York State Department of Education, 1987; Henderson and Lezotte, 1988; Holcomb, 1991). In the New York State model (1987) there are five stages: Preparation (roles, expectations, membership); Start-Up (establish trust, procedures) Group Problem Solving and Process Analysis (negotiate disagreements, do data analysis); Action Planning (establish priorities, funding, activities); Implementation and Evaluation (do, and evaluate the results). Henderson and Lezotte (1988) list similar steps, but focus more on the actual

correlates as the basis for a committee structure which then produces a negotiated picture of strengths and weaknesses and an action plan focused upon specific goals with a specific time frame for accomplishment.

It is likely that both "products" of discrete planning and development "processes" are better understood through the lens of culture, particularly the culture of the a particular school and its school system. Cultures of schools are a composite of values, beliefs, and basic assumptions manifested in symbols and rituals which provide a sense of what and how things should be done. The culture and subcultures of schools play an important role in guiding the change process. As Rossman, Corbett, and Firestone (1988) express it, "Successful change must either accommodate that [normative] core [of a school's culture] or engage in the difficult task of reinterpreting, redefining, and reshaping it" (p. 19). It may be that continued attention to the sub-processes or what Levine and Lezotte (1990) term the specific "components" of the implementation model(s) as related to the dynamic cultural contexts (Deal, 1985) will result in more useful and predictive analyses of the overall process of school development towards effectiveness.

Methods

The primary method for the study was a qualitative case study which included interviews, observations and documents analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1984) spanning a three year period. During the first year of the study 205 teachers and 13 administrators (a 95 percent sample) were

formally interviewed by one of a team of three researchers and queried by questionnaire using instruments developed from the Connecticut model (Villanova, 1984). In the final year of the study, five teachers were randomly selected at each building and seven building principals were interviewed by one of a team of two researchers with a protocol (see Appendix) based on the 1988 interviews (a total of 42, hour long interviews). In addition, student outcomes consisting of Stanford Achievement Reading and Mathematics scores as well as attendance, suspensions, retentions and drop-out behaviors were studied for grade cohorts. Documents consisting of building level reports, mission statements and plans were reviewed for evidence of process change.

During the fall of 1988, an assessment of pupil performance as well as the seven characteristics of Effective Schools was completed for each school in the Partland Public Schools. Stanford test scores were reported by school and grade and were disaggregated at the fortieth percentile by family background measures. Nearly all teachers and principals were interviewed and completed questionnaires concerning the seven characteristics of Effective Schools as identified by the Connecticut State Department of Education. Subsequently, each year pupil performance was reported in the annual District Progress Report (DPR) and school performance was monitored at district administrative team meetings.

During the spring of 1991 a more formal follow-up study was conducted by University of Vermont researchers Meyers and Carlson. In this study, pupil performance was compared in a pre-post analysis and five teachers

were randomly (stratified by grade level assignment) chosen for hour-long follow-up interviews which focused on the progress that teachers perceived was made on the seven characteristics. A secondary, contextual concern was teacher perceptions and recommendations about the upcoming reorganization of the Partland City School District in which grade level organization superseded the local catchment area at each elementary school.

Data Source(s).

Data was gathered on the process of implementation by interviews with protocols adapted from the Connecticut School Effectiveness Interview and Connecticut School Effectiveness Questionnaire (Villanova, 1984). Two-hundred and sixty, approximately one-hour interviews were reviewed. In addition, field notes from administrative council meetings, school visitations and Board meetings were reviewed along with documents generated by the schools and district office. Finally, student records were used to track performance on standardized tests, attendance, suspensions, retentions and drop-out behaviors during the three year period.

Results

Outcome measures.

With respect to questions of progress towards quality and equity, the district made some progress towards increasing overall performance on standardized tests.

Quality.

Comparisons of pupil performance over the three year period show some gains in the direction of higher quality.

Table 1

STANFORD ACHIEVEMENT MEDIAN NATIONAL PERCENTILE RANKS
DISTRICT WIDE

N=695 in Grades 3-6

Subtest	1988 Medians	1989 Medians	1990 M
Social Studies	59	61	63
Science	64	68	69
Total Reading	57	59	65
Total Mathematics	45	51	53
Complete Battery	57	63	65

The above results indicate a consistent, though not dramatic picture of increasing levels of overall student performance. A finer grained picture of grade level performance does, however indicate statistically significant gains over the three year developmental period for cohorts of students defined at grade levels three through six. See Table 2 and the Cohort charts for Reading and Math which immediately follow.

Table 2

COHORT COMPARISONS OF TOTAL READING AND TOTAL MATHEMATICS PERFORMANCE PERCENT OF STUDENTS AT OR ABOVE THE FORTIETH PERCENTILE

Cohort	N	Test	Year	Percent
Grade 3	176	Total Reading	1988	54
			1989	73*
			1990	74*
	183	Total Mathematics	1988	42
			1989	56*
			1990	60*
Grade 4	174	Total Reading	1988	67
			1989	73*
			1990	78*
	175	Total Mathematics	1988	55
			1989	69*
			1990	76*
Grade 5	148	Total Reading	1988	54
			1989	72*
			1990	65*
	151	Total Mathematics	1988	63
			1989	77*
			1990	57*
Grade 6	156	Total Reading	1988	67
			1989	62
			1990	56*
	157	Total Mathematics	1988	65
			1989	48*
			1990	49*

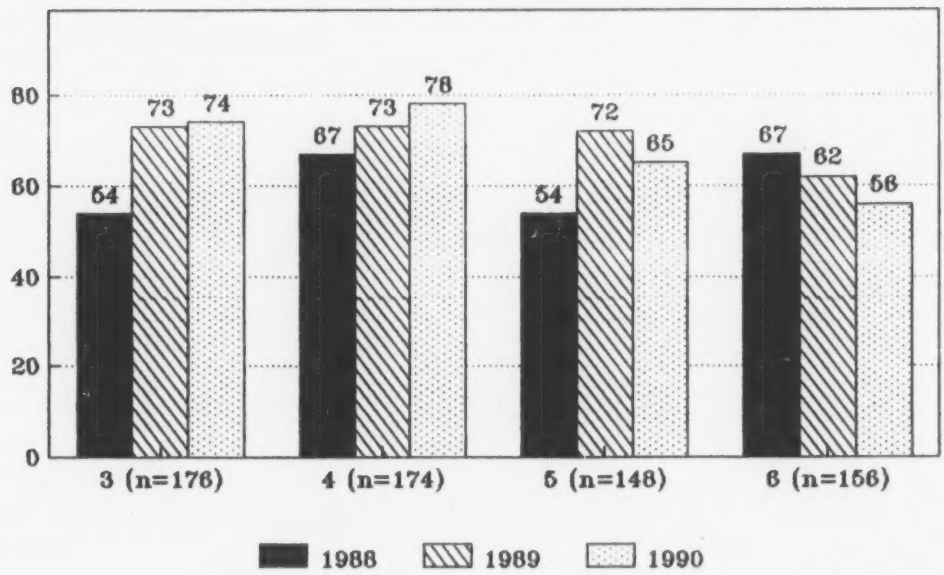
* Z-Test of Proportions with base year of 1988; $P<.05$ (Brace and Brace, 1992)

An interesting phenomena occurs for the cohorts defined at grades five

FIGURE 1

READING COHORTS

MEDIAN PERCENTILES



READING COHORTS

MEDIAN PERCENTILES

	1988	1989	1990
GRADE 3	53	73*	74*
GRADE 4	67	73*	78*
GRADE 5	54	72*	65*
GRADE 6	67	62	56*

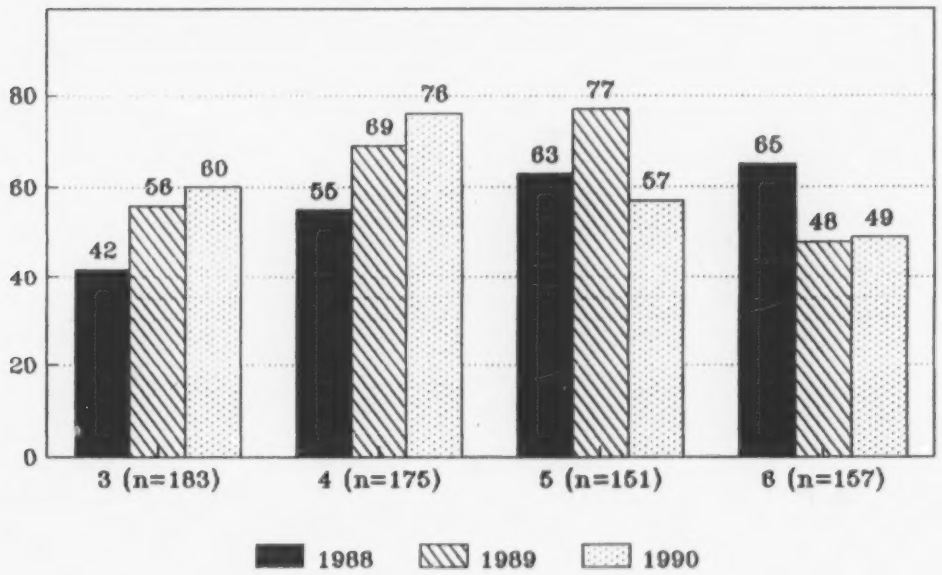
Z Test for Proportions

*= SIGNIFICANT AT P<.05

FIGURE 2

MATHEMATICS COHORTS

MEDIAN PERCENTILES



MATHEMATICS COHORTS

MEDIAN PERCENTILES

	1988	1989	1990
GRADE 3	42	56*	60*
GRADE 4	55	69*	76*
GRADE 5	63	77*	57*
GRADE 6	65	48*	49*

Z Test for Proportions

*= SIGNIFICANT AT P<.05

and six. While the performance of other grades is consistently in an upward direction with respect to the national percentiles, at grades five and six the proportions decrease when these students move to grades seven and eight. This is consistent with performance of students in other Vermont cohort studies when students were followed from grades four through twelve (Meyers, 1989). In this particular case, since the curricular interventions (action plans) were particularly aimed at the elementary grades, it might be argued that performance in the junior high might have been expected to decline. (One issue for the implementation period was the articulation between the elementary grades and secondary programs, see Table 3, below.)

Other measures of overall performance with respect to truancies and suspensions for the three year period likewise showed some gain. Both truancy and suspensions were areas of concern for secondary grades action planning.

Table 3

PROPORTIONS OF STUDENTS TRUANT AND SUSPENDED FOR THE YEARS 1988-1990

Truant	Grades	Year	Percent
	K-6	1988	3
		1989	1
		1990	1
	7-12	1988	11
		1989	12
		1990	6
Suspensions	K-6	1988	2
		1989	1
		1990	1
	7-12	1988	16
		1989	16
		1990	9

Comparisons of drop-out rates for students who did not transfer to other schools, but left without enrolling in another educational program presents comparability problems. While classes are sometimes different with respect to propensity to drop-out which seems independent of school policy and practice, the comparisons of cohorts at grade levels provides some indication of patterns of performance. Three such comparisons may not be significant but the decrease in the proportions of drop-outs for each pair of grade level comparisons over two years for which data is available seems to indicate a trend away from large cumulative proportions of cohort groups. See Table 4.

Table 4
CUMULATIVE GRADE LEVEL DROP-OUT RATIOS, 1988-1990

Grades	Years	Percent Drop-Out
9-10	1988-89	16
9-10	1989-90	8
10-11	1988-89	22
10-11	1989-90	7
11-12	1988-89	17
11-12	1989-90	12

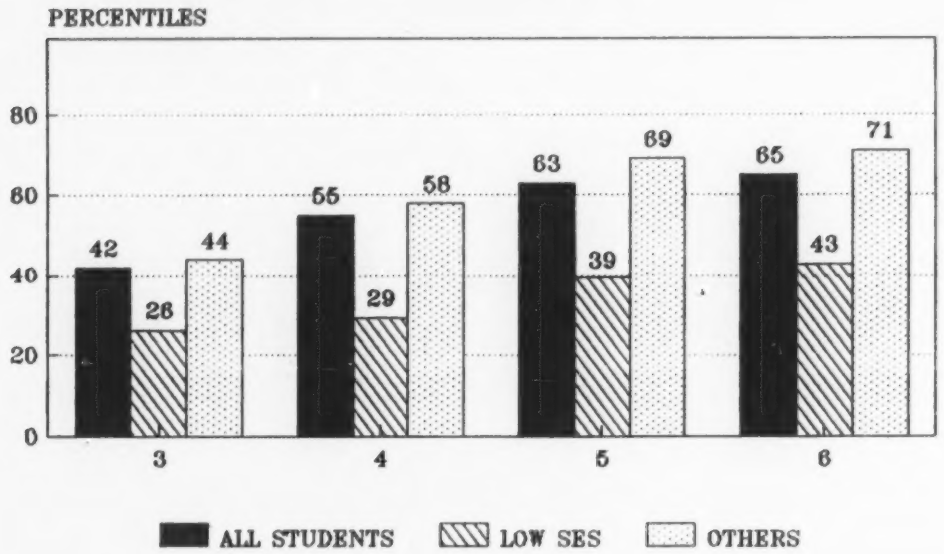
Equity.

District performance with respect to equity was less than satisfactory to the district wide planning team. For the elementary population, where free or reduced lunch eligibility ranged from twenty eight to thirty-four percent of the school population as low income, the average percentage of students who were both low income and at or above the fortieth percentile was significantly less than other students in both reading and mathematics. Figures 3 through 5 indicate the relative difference among groups of students formed by SES with respect to median percentile ranks for reading and mathematics over the three year period. In general, while there was some improvement among a few cohorts of students at grade level the differentials between low income and others either grew in favor of other children or remained the same.

Within particular schools which had low concentrations of low SES children there were some dramatic changes in favor of the low income children. For example, in one school with only eight low income children, all eight moved above the fortieth percentile in both reading and mathematics during the three year period. Three of the five elementary schools had in fact made gains in reducing the proportion of low income students at or below the fortieth percentile, but in these schools, the percentage of low income children in each school was far below the district average. In schools where the low income population approached sixty percent, virtually no gains were made for cohorts of low income children. (This analysis was later used as rationale for redistricting the city.)

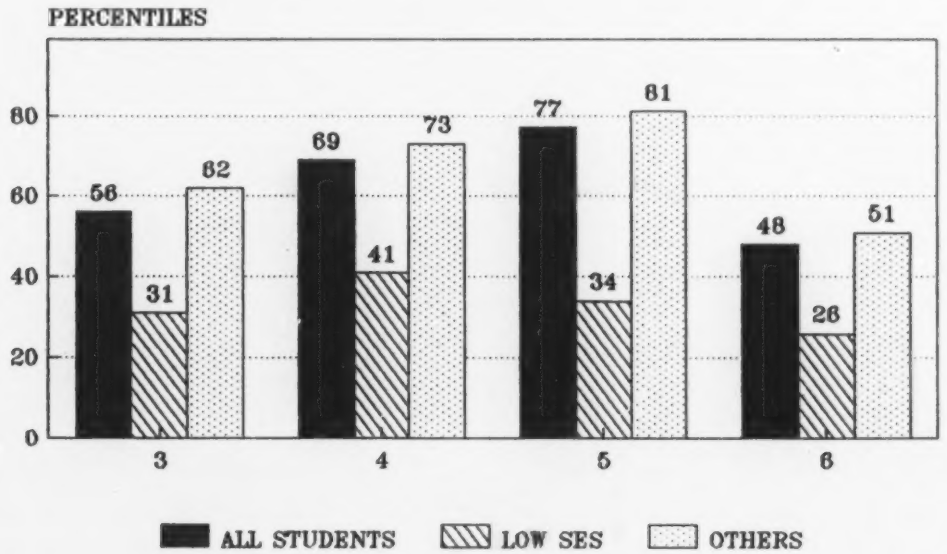
FIGURE 3

STANFORD MATH BY SES
MEDIAN PERCENTILES 1988



N=670

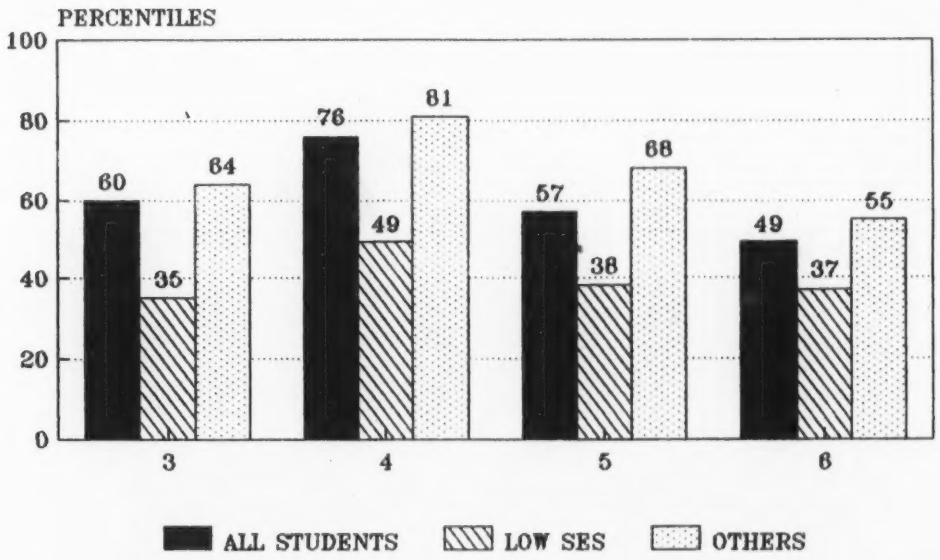
STANFORD MATH BY SES
MEDIAN PERCENTILES 1989



N=724

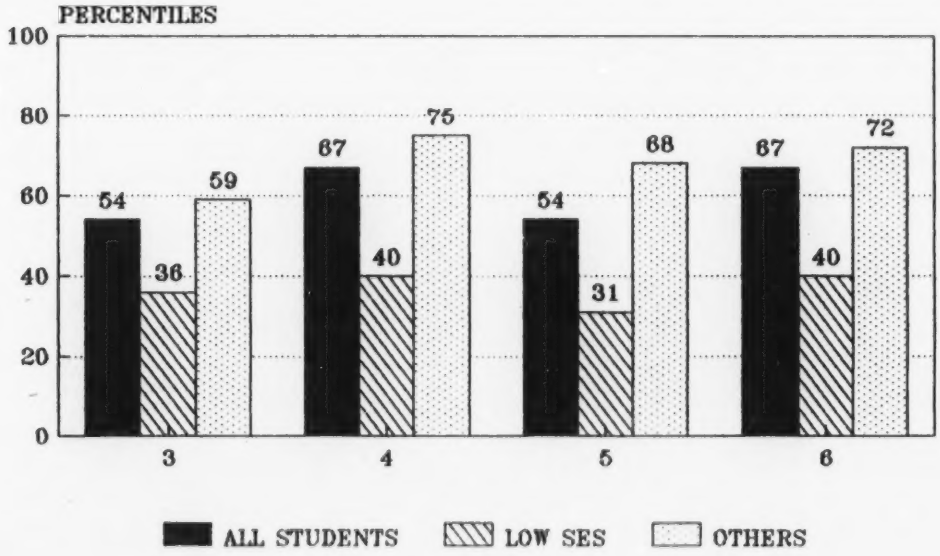
FIGURE 4

STANFORD MATH BY SES
1990



N=731

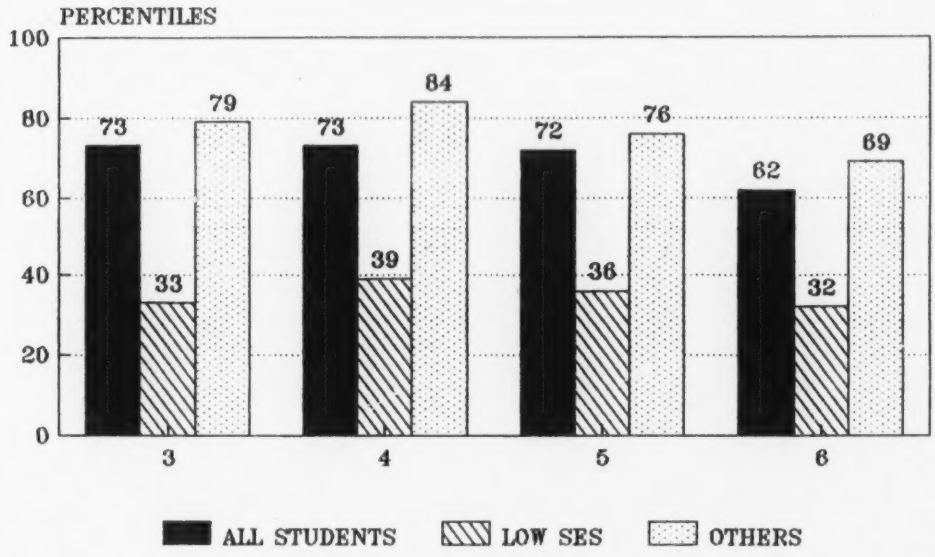
STANFORD READ BY SES
1988



N=679

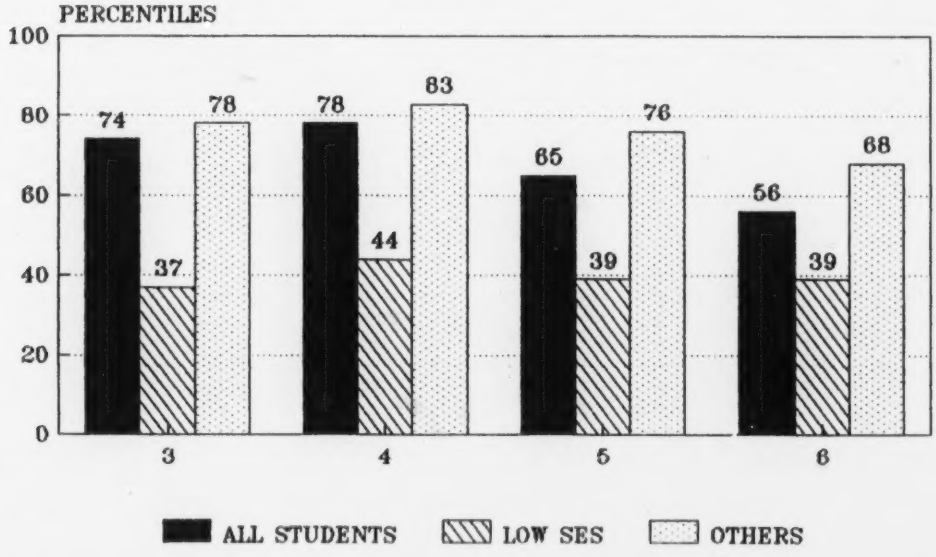
FIGURE 5

STANFORD READ BY SES
1989



N=675

STANFORD READ BY SES
1990



N=736

Process measures.

Process variables included measures of the seven correlates identified in the Effective Schools literature above. Implementation of the sequence implied in models of implementation described by Levine and Lezotte (1990) and Holcomb (1991) began with the district administration.

The role of District Administration.

Initially, the district administrative team, (the superintendent, central office staff and principals) was primarily responsible for the initiation of the effective schools sequence of events which began with awareness activities, for teachers and Board members and continued with assessments, the formation of building level planning teams, action planning and assessment of results. Throughout the first two years of the sequence the administrative team held monthly seminars with a consultant from the University to review plans and results.

Key events during the three year period included the passage of a district policy statement by the Board which recognized the differentials in performance between low income and other children and set specific goals for increasing quality and at the same time ensuring equity of outcomes between low income and other children. District wide inservice programs which focused on the correlates of effective schools and which required that school planning teams develop action plans were held following throughout the school year following a week long institute at the end of the summer of the second year.

In January of each year a formal district wide progress report was prepared and shared with the Board and staff. The data on performance was broken down by school and included such variables as standardized tests, absences, suspensions and retentions.

The Correlates.

At the end of three years, a series of 45 interviews were conducted with a random sample of the faculties of all seven schools. Results here indicated that with respect to the perceptions of faculty and administrators about the seven correlates, there was a differentiated picture of change in the status of the characteristics from school to school, but that "best practices" thought to be associated with some characteristics appeared to be embedded in the language and practice in each elementary school and the junior high school.

The emphasis of change common to district schools during this period seemed centered in the characteristics of school climate, leadership, school mission and home/school relations. For example, among the interviews teachers cited outcomes of successful action plans involving school discipline, cleaning and painting the buildings. Forty out of forty-five interviews cited what teachers termed, "more positive attitudes among children and other teachers" as attributable to the action plans developed during the past three years. Thirty out of forty-five teachers cited improved school leadership, and more participation by teachers in decision making in five out of the seven schools. In two schools teachers often termed changes in leadership behavior as "dramatic."

During the three years, none of the principalships had changed personnel (although two were on extended medical leave during the period and their schools were managed by teams of teachers). Nearly all teachers interviewed, forty-two out of forty-five indicated that an emphasis on defining school mission had begun during the past three years. What was extraordinary about this was that in previous interviews, three years prior, very few teachers used a vocabulary including concepts of school mission, shared vision, collaboration. In the post interviews, mission related concepts were quite common. Finally, it was evident in three out of five elementary schools that building relationships between parents and the schools as an outcome of action planning was quite common and attributed by teachers to the Effective Schools initiatives. Other correlates concerning time to learn, the monitoring of pupil progress and high expectations for all students were mentioned by teachers, but not with sufficient frequency or intensity to suggest that these characteristics had been the focus of action planning.

Roots, trees and the forest.

So far, the case study seems to parallel others done by the authors during the period 1982 through 1988. In these studies, the pattern of creating awareness, doing assessment of both outcome and process variables related to school effectiveness, action planning, implementation and evaluation, while not linear processes, were evident then as now. But, when teachers were asked to reflect upon the process of developing the action plans in their schools most of them related elements of the following story:

When the awareness activities got underway during the fall of 1987, teachers were suspicious that "Effective Schools" was another in a long line of initiatives like "Mastery Learning," "Supervision for Success" and "Open Education," that had come and either gone or were still underway, taking time and effort. The metaphor of "trying to kiss a moving train" emerged among teachers' descriptions of the first year. Many teachers remembered the resistance to even discussing the correlates of Effective Schools.

At the beginning of the second year of the project, the administrative team discussed the resistance to action planning at length during three of the seminar sessions they had with the university based consultant. The university consultant suggested a metaphor for the process of action planning which involved identifying existing district initiatives as fitting the correlates under an umbrella of Effective Schools. The administrative team, however designed an alternative pictured in the figure below. The "roots" they reasoned were the school based district initiatives such as drug education, elements of instruction and the new mathematics curriculum. The "trees" were the correlates of the Effective Schools literature. The "forest" was the whole of the district effort to improve schools for all children. When teachers began to invent this model as they discussed the problem of "overload", the resistance to action planning began to diminish. Existing initiatives either survived or fell by the wayside and new ones emerged.

What seemed most important to building level teams during the process was the opportunity to define existing initiatives as supportive of the school development effort.

ROOTS, TREES AND THE FOREST

FIGURE 6

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None of the teams was anxious to "get aboard a new train", but all were able to see ongoing efforts which pre-dated 1988, as part of a school improvement pattern. To the interview team, repeated references from teachers and administrators to projects which they now defined as part to the school improvement effort seemed evidence of the teachers opening their own "doors to school improvement," (Joyce, 1991).

Equity revisited.

The administrative team and Board were concerned when during the initial assessment it was evident that the gap was large between low income and other students with respect to performance on the Stanford. Each year when the district report was published for each school and the district, overall gains in scores, attendance and suspensions were noted but there was little effect on the performance of low income students in two of the schools which drew from low income areas of the city. In December of the third year of the project a plan emerged from the Superintendent and the Board to redistrict the elementary schools. The plan called for the redesign of the elementary schools which had been neighborhood schools. With the fall of 1991, elementary students would be distributed by grade level across the city. This had the effect of breaking up the poorer neighborhoods and distributing children among schools in a more heterogeneous fashion with respect to social class. The impetus for the plan was attributed by the Superintendent and Central Office staff to the analysis of pupil performance which showed poor results in low income schools.

In so far as the interviews for this phase of the study took place in late May, 1991, many of the concerns identified by teachers for the next phase of school improvement centered upon the reorganization. Teachers were worried that initiatives begun by teams of administrators and teachers would be lost because the teams would now be broken up. A few teachers expressed some anxiety about being reassigned to a new school in the "poorer" part of town. Many teachers pointed out that the district needed to be restructured in a broad sense with respect to teaching approaches, teacher decision making and funding, not only reorganized with respect to grade levels within schools. However, an underlying theme which emerged in the interviews was that the basis for restructuring had been established during the three year period when teams of teachers and administrators made plans and assessed the results of their planning. As one teacher put it,

> "..this district has come so far in the past three years. Maybe this reorganization will set us back a bit by breaking up some of the teams, but I don't think so. Many teachers I have talked with are anxious to work with colleagues they may have worked with ten years ago. (The district has a veteran staff, average tenure of 18 years.) We've come too far, there's no going back now. This is really for the kids this time."

This consciousness about the needs of kids particularly low income students as compared to their middle and upper income peers grew out the implementation process initiated by an assessment study of each school using the effective school correlates.

The individual school studies coupled with building and district level inservice activities helped to reinforce the effective schools philosophy and related concepts. The consequence of focusing on the effective schools literature over an extended period of time was to build a common set of values and language. The cultures of the schools and the district became more aligned and thus make it less traumatic to reorganize the district. Teachers and administrators revealed in the interviews that a strong commitment had been developed in the district to the ideals of effective schools (quality and equity) and these would serve as a basis for establishing collaboration among new faculties in each of the newly constituted schools.

In addition to having this shared vision, teachers and administrators spoke of having learned a great deal from the school improvement process itself. The insights of their shared experiences gave them confidence that the new faculties could establish rapport quickly and begin building a culture in each of their schools that would be an extension of their work of the previous years. As Deal and Peterson (1990) express it,

> Most principals [and teachers] must work with a cultural tapestry that is already woven. They must somehow reinforce thin spots or tears, shape it to cover different or changed surfaces, or even try to reverse the fabric without unraveling the share meaning. There is a delicate balance between a principal [and teachers] doing nothing and doing harm. The Chinese call this balance wei-wu, the place between inaction and undue force. This balance is at the center of effective leadership and cultural change. (p. 14)

It seems the lessons learned from the school district's experimentation with the effective schools' concepts and processes build a firm foundation for enterring into their reorganization plan.

They may have achieved what Rosenholtz (1989) concluded in her research on schools;

> ...[I]n successful schools, regardless of all past history, shared principles govern. We find most often in successful schools a capacity to cherish individuality and inspire communality that is the hallmark of our loftiest institutions. (p. 221)

Epilogue.

Nearly a year later, with a new Superintendent and a new organizational pattern, five principals who were contacted either in person or by telephone in the process of writing this paper, confirmed that most of the initiatives begun or carried forward by the school development initiative under the aegis of Effective Schools were still in place. Partland seems left with a forest of school improvement made up of trees which teachers can discern as Climate, Leadership, Expectations, etc. These trees are in turn supported by roots of initiatives which teachers have invented. Like Joyce, (1991) this research concludes that making connections among school improvement strategies within schools builds synergy, while overemphasizing one strategy actually diffuses energy and commitment.

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